

36 Hours in Toronto

The New York Times

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April 11, 2024

Original URL: [36 Hours in Toronto: Things to Do and See - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/11/travel/36-hours-in-toronto-things-to-do-and-see.html)

Locals may insist (politely, of course) that Toronto doesn't belong atop any traveler's wish list, but don't fall for that Canadian modesty. Proudly multicultural with an outstanding art scene, fantastic food and a patchwork of diverse neighborhoods to explore, this sprawling city — Canada's most populous — has more to offer than one could possibly digest in a single weekend. But that's enough time to sample the local smorgasbord, from the many new restaurants and shops to the latest art exhibitions and a newly revitalized landmark theater. Anyone in town for [Hot Docs](#), North America's biggest documentary festival, which begins on April 25, will find plenty of reasons to roam beyond the downtown core, from the beaches in the east to drinking and dining hotspots that have sprouted in some unexpected places in the west.

Recommendations

Key stops

- **Trillium Park**, west of Toronto's inner harbor, is relatively crowd-free despite having an outstanding view of the downtown skyline.
- **Sunny's Chinese**, a popular restaurant hidden inside a mini-mall in the Kensington Market neighborhood, serves fun plates like Hong Kong-style French toast with black-sesame jam.
- The **Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto** is currently hosting "Greater Toronto Art 2024," the second installment of its triennial.
- **Cry Baby Gallery** is an art space with a cocktail bar hidden behind a curtain in the back.

Itinerary

Friday



Trillium Park
4 p.m. **Wander along the waterfront**

[Trillium Park](#), which opened in 2017 just west of Toronto's inner harbor, remains relatively uncrowded despite having an outstanding view of the skyline. From Queens Quay West, it's an easy half-hour walk to the park along the popular Martin Goodman Trail. Or rent a bicycle from one of the many bike-share stations and pedal along the lakeshore. After admiring the view of the iconic CN Tower across the water, head back toward downtown, stopping at nearby [Inukshuk Park](#), with its 30-foot-high Inuit stone formation, and at the Toronto Music Garden, a grassy waterfront park where live performances take place during the summer.

6 p.m. **Enjoy a Chinese feast**

Down the hallway of a nondescript mini-mall, a small handwritten sign on a door indicates you've found [Sunny's Chinese](#). Since opening in the eclectic Kensington Market neighborhood in 2022, this buzzy spot has packed its mint green booths with crowds hankering for a spicy, family-style feast. On a recent visit, highlights included the spinach-and-chrysanthemum-stem salad (12 Canadian dollars, or about \$9), fiery dan dan noodles (19 dollars), and what a server said "pays our rent": the sublime Hong Kong-style French toast layered with black-sesame jam and oolong-infused condensed milk (14 dollars). Couldn't nab a reservation? Try for a last-minute table at nearby [Patois](#), a festive Caribbean-Asian restaurant with flaky Jamaican patties (12 dollars) and jerk chicken chow mein (27 dollars).



Massey Hall

8 p.m. **Surround yourself in sound**

In 2021, Torontonians applauded the reopening of [Massey Hall](#), a landmark theater, after a three-year renovation and modernization project. For over a century, this downtown concert hall has hosted top international performers, including Charlie Parker, Aretha Franklin, Gordon Lightfoot and Jon Batiste. The revitalized theater is now part of a larger performing arts complex, the [Allied Music Centre](#), with a new music venue and recording studios in an adjacent building. But one thing that hasn't changed: the famously excellent acoustics. To hear for yourself, check the calendar for upcoming events, which include

concerts by the Black Crowes, the indie-rock group Waxahatchee and the Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn.



Grange Park, just south of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Saturday



Saturday farmers' market at Evergreen Brick Works
10 a.m. **Swing by the farmers' market, then take a hike**

A former quarry and brick factory have been repurposed as [Evergreen Brick Works](#), a cultural community center northeast of downtown. People flock here on Saturdays for the year-round farmers' market, which reflects the diversity of the city itself. In addition to the usual market stalls — local cheeses, produce, fish, meat and bread — many vendors sell prepared foods that include [Persian baklava](#), [Swedish pastries](#) and [Tibetan momos](#) (try the beef ones doused with hot sauce; 11.50 dollars for five). Seating is available between the

historic brick kilns, but in fair weather, grab your food to go and explore the trails snaking through the surrounding forested ravines.

12 p.m. **Explore two small museums**

Many visitors prioritize the best-known museums, but that would mean missing niche standouts like the [Gardiner Museum](#), which specializes in the artistry and craft of ceramics. Inside, explore ancient figures from Mesoamerican cultures and contemporary sculptural vases depicting polar animals by the Inuit ceramicist Roger Aksadjuak (admission, 15 dollars). Afterward, stroll along the Philosopher's Walk, a nearby path through the leafy [St. George campus](#) of the University of Toronto. Then continue to the [Bata Shoe Museum](#), another oft-overlooked institution, where an unexpectedly fascinating, two-floor exhibit traces the history of what we put on our feet (admission, 14 dollars).



Issues Magazine Shop

2:30 p.m. **Shop for hard-to-find titles and handmade treasures**

Little Portugal is packed with quirky independent shops and galleries, many conveniently clustered along Dundas Street West. Start at [Easy Tiger Goods](#), a sunny boutique that sells pastel taper candles and cute made-in-Toronto ceramics. Peruse the rare print titles at [Issues Magazine Shop](#), then shop for hand-crocheted coasters and embroidered tote bags at [Etc Home](#). Consider investing in an artwork at [Zaal Art Gallery](#), a cavernous space that opened last October showcasing paintings, photographs, sculptures and fashion from

contemporary Iranian artists. Later, continue farther down the street to [Bad Attitude Bread](#), a vegan bakery, for an Old Bay-seasoned Cheddar-flavored biscuit (5 dollars), and to [Milky's](#), a cool cafe nearby, for a spiced maple syrup latte (6.50 dollars).

4 p.m. Get a snapshot of contemporary Toronto art

An excellent primer on what's happening in the city's art scene is now on display at the [Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto](#), in a former factory building in the Lower Junction Triangle neighborhood. The current exhibition, "Greater Toronto Art 2024," is the second installment of the museum's triennial and features a range of artworks, performances and installations, including photographs by the American-born artist June Clark of her adopted home of Toronto in the 1970s and '80s; a site-specific greenhouse installed by the Brooklyn-based Canadian artist Lotus L. Kang; and a series of sculptural drawings, traced from an heirloom Persian rug, from the Iraqi-born Canadian artist Sukaina Kubba (through July 28; admission, 14 dollars).



7:30 p.m. Follow a roast chicken with a showstopping soft serve

Roast chicken and local produce are the winning formula at [Taverne Bernhardt's](#), a cozy neighborhood bistro on a quiet lane south of Dundas Street West, where date-night couples sip wine at the pewter-topped bar and groups of friends encircle tables along a soft leather banquette. The short seasonal menu recently included tender roasted carrots with herbs and tahini (20 dollars), in addition to the crisp-skinned, rotisserie-style chicken served on a platter with thick-cut fries, coleslaw and pickles, toasted sesame-seed buns, and a side of gravy (37 dollars). And for dessert, there's a heaping swirl of soft serve in changing flavors, like Earl Grey (14 dollars).

10 p.m. **Discover hidden nightlife**

Exploring Toronto's nightlife could mean ice bathing at [Othership](#), a sociable sauna downtown, or sipping a white stout at [Blood Brothers Brewing](#) in the revitalized northwestern warehouse district. But you needn't venture that far after dinner to find appealing options, if you know where to look. It's a short walk from Bernhardt's to [Cry Baby Gallery](#), a white-walled art space where a curtain in the back hides a moody cocktail bar serving spicy mezcal margaritas (the best is the passion-fruit version, 20 dollars). Even closer is [Bowie](#), a vibey, mirrored lounge that opened last year beneath a laundromat. It offers great people-watching and pink Paloma cocktails (16 dollars), and is accessible via an unmarked entrance (down the alley, below the neon bow-tied mouse sign). Later, visit [Bathurst Local](#), where a laid-back bar leads to a maze of private karaoke rooms, each more colorful than the last.



People strolling in the trendy West Queen West area.

Sunday



8:30 a.m. **Walk along the beach(es)**

The ocean may be hundreds of miles away, but you can still start the day with a walk on the beach. On the east side of the city, an easy streetcar ride from downtown, the neighborhood abutting Lake Ontario is known as the Beaches (or the Beach, depending on [whom you ask](#)) because of its long, sandy shoreline. Head down to the water to join locals walking their dogs through the sand. From the easternmost edge, it's a leisurely half-hour promenade along the wood-plank boardwalk to Woodbine Beach, the widest stretch of sand lapped by the lake's calm waves.

10:30 a.m. **Slide into a booth for pancakes and comforting melts**

When hunger strikes, hop back on the streetcar headed west to the [White Lily Diner](#), an all-day restaurant in the Riverside neighborhood serving its own brand of comfort food. One must-order is the cheesy patty melt, served with poblano relish on house-made bread (23.25 dollars), which comes with a side salad of crisp greens from the restaurant's own [White Lily Farms](#), northeast of the city. This snug locale has only five counter seats and seven Dijon yellow booths, so there's often a wait. But I'd happily queue for even a single bite of the fluffy buttermilk griddle cakes with maple syrup (16.25 dollars).



McMichael Canadian Art Collection
12:30 p.m. **Admire art amid the trees**

Yes, it's a trek to the [McMichael Canadian Art Collection](#), a sprawling gallery surrounded by acres of pristine woodland, about 17 miles northwest of downtown. But there's no prettier place to become acquainted with some of Canada's most influential artists: Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven, a collective of landscape painters who rose to fame in the early 20th century with their romantic depictions of Canadian nature. Admire the rural landscape paintings, including glacial mountains by Lawren Harris and placid lakes by A.J. Casson. Then visit galleries dedicated to contemporary Canadian works, including those by Inuit and First Nations artists, such as the brilliantly colorful paintings of [Norval Morrisseau](#). Not keen on splurging for a car ride? There's an equally edifying collection of Canadian art — minus the sylvan setting — at the [Art Gallery of Ontario](#) downtown (admission to the McMichael, 20 dollars; to the AGO, 30 dollars). (The AGO is temporarily closed because of a workers' strike.)